

Feature-rich New Cameras From OLYMPUS, PENTAX, NIKON & APPLE

If you want to get a glimpse of what new features you're likely to find on future pro cameras, you need to check out the newest cameras being introduced for consumers and advanced amateurs. It seems to me that, even more than in the immediate past, these are the most interesting new cameras appearing on the market.

Whichever way you look at it, the difference in features and image quality between "consumer" cameras, costing \$500 to \$800, and high-end professional cameras, costing \$4000 to \$8000, has shrunk enormously. In some cases the capabilities of less expensive cameras is greater than that of the expensive ones.

Olympus E-P1

Undoubtedly the most intriguing new camera is the new Olympus E-P1. It does not look like much from the outside as it has the retro look of an old rangefinder camera. Immediately you'll notice it does not have an optical viewfinder.



The new Olympus E-P1 is described as a multimedia-capture device rather than a camera because of its versatility.

The camera is the first Olympus to meet the new Micro Four Thirds standard that has also been adopted by Panasonic for its Lumix G system. The awkward name does not refer to the size of the sensor, instead it refers to the smaller camera and lens system. It's made possible because of the shorter distance between the lens and the sensor as these Micro Four Thirds cameras dispense with a mirror assembly and rely instead on an electronic viewfinder just like point-and-shoot cameras.

Many professionals and high-end amateurs have been bemoaning the fact there are no compact cameras on the market, except for the Sigma DP1 and DP2, which feature a large sensor, so they should welcome the Olympus E-P1. Although the Four Thirds sensor is smaller than the APS-C sensor (18x13.5mm vs. 23.6x15.8mm) used in the majority of DSLRs, it is still at least six times larger than sensors in regular point-and-shoot cameras, even top-of-the-line models such as the highly regarded Canon G10.

The 12.3-megapixel sensor in the Olympus E-P1 is the same as in the Olympus E-30 and includes the same art filters as well as some

new ones. It can also shoot 720P HD video and even apply many of the art filters in video mode. According to Olympus, it also has excellent stereo sound capture capabilities. Multimedia shows can be created in-camera using stills, video and sound. Indeed, because of its versatility Olympus likes to call it a "multimedia capture device" instead of a camera.

Most important, the E-P1 has interchangeable lenses making it a unique camera—it's neither a point-and-shoot nor a DSLR. It uses a new range of small Zuiko lenses and can also use larger Olympus DSLR lenses via an adaptor. For those who don't want to rely on the rear screen for framing, there is an optional optical scope that can be affixed to the hot shoe. Incidentally, it does not have built-in flash.

It's an intriguing new camera that might well find a multitude of uses for pro photographers. Olympus likes to say it is a digital version of its original PEN system that was introduced 50 years ago. The company sold over 17 million of those during a 20+ year period.

Pentax K-7

The K-7 is a traditional DSLR that replaces the K20D. Although it still has a 14.6-megapixel sensor, Pentax says it is all-new and allows for the capture of 720P HD video. It has a potentially great new HDR feature. It can take three rapid-fire images—without lowering the mirror between each shot—at different exposures and immediately combine the three shots to produce a wide-gamut image with more detail in dark and light areas. Naturally, it will not be very useful for moving subjects and it's likely it will need to be mounted on a tripod, but it does introduce yet another feature that removes the



The Pentax K-7 has a weatherproof, dustproof and cold-proof construction.

need for an image-editing program to achieve the same effect.

Even though the K-7 is only \$1300, it has a high level of weather resistance, dustproof and cold-proof construction. Pentax has also introduced two new entry-level weather-resistant zoom lenses. It's great to see Pentax joining Olympus in offering this feature. To get anywhere near this level of weatherproof in a Canon or Nikon you've got to spend over \$4000. It's yet another trend that I think will come to all but low-end cameras.

Sony Entry-level Alpha Models

The newest entry-level Sony alpha models (DSLR-A230, DSLR-A 330 and DSLR-A 380) do not have a lot of new features but Sony says it has purposely made them as small and light as possible.

It has also made the menu system much more user friendly and even tries to explain the relationship of aperture and speed and its effect on a photograph within the menu system. Sony's intent is to make a DSLR more appealing to those consumers moving up from point-and-shoot cameras that are intimidated by the complexity and weight of traditional DSLRs.



Sony's new alpha DSLR-A330 is aimed squarely at amateur photographers moving up from a compact camera.

The three models range in price from \$550 to \$850 and include an 18–55mm zoom lens. All three have built-in image stabilization and dust-removal systems. All models include live view, but no video capture, and the top two models also feature a tilting rear LCD screen.

Apple iPhone 3G S

Strictly speaking, the iPhone is not a camera, nor is it a phone. In reality it is a small Mac computer that happens to incorporate a phone, and in the newest version, a better camera and camcorder. The camera in the first two versions of the iPhone was barely adequate but the new iPhone 3G S has a 3-megapixel camera (more than in the original Nikon D1) that can autofocus, shoot close-ups and can be used for VGA video capture.

What's more, because it is also a powerful computer, the iPhone includes simple video editing and the ability to access numerous downloadable programs from third parties. There are already many photographic apps available for the iPhone and with the added quality and versatility of the improved camera we can expect many more.



Apple's newest iPhone 3G S model has an improved 3-megapixel camera that can autofocus by tapping the subject on the screen.

My dream is to see the guts of the iPhone incorporated into the body of a DSLR. One can only imagine the possibilities—instant GPS marking with compass direction, watermarking, sound, simple editing, captioning, metatagging, etc. Even more important would be the ability to immediately upload thumbnail images for copyright registration in real time.

Just as still and video cameras are coming together, I foresee smart mobile phones being integrated into a camera. I just wonder who the first camera company will be to join forces with a mobile phone company.

Nikon D5000—Hands-on Preview

The latest Nikon DSLR was introduced in June and I have been able to spend a few weeks trying one. Unlike the upcoming cameras mentioned above, the D5000 does not break a lot of new ground, at least from an amateur's point of view. Ironically, it does though for a Nikon or Canon DSLR user as it is the first DSLR from either of these major manufacturers to have a swiveling rear screen, which is almost a necessity for a camera that can shoot video like the D5000.

The D5000 costs \$730 for the body only or \$850 with an AF-S Nikkor 18–55mm f/3.5–5.6G VR kit lens. The 12.3-megapixel sensor is the same as the one in the \$900 D90 camera, which in turn is almost identical to the D300, which costs twice as much. Of course, the D5000 has fewer features, is slower to focus and it can only shoot at 4fps.

However, in use I found the D5000 quite pleasant, with the usual Nikon ergonomics. The swivel screen is useful for shooting from awkward angles but still not quite as flexible as that on the Olympus E-3 or E-30 as the D5000's screen swings out from the base instead of the side.

I shot some 720p HD video clips and found the camera more intuitive as a camcorder than the D90. It's still not possible to autofocus while recording but, then again, true videographers like to manual focus anyway. Fortunately, the image stabilization in VR lenses



Top: Nikon's GP-1 GPS unit captured the GPS coordinates seen in the metadata for this grab shot.

Above: The menu system on the Nikon D5000 is more user friendly than ever before.

Right: Nikon's new D5000 camera features a swiveling rear screen and the same 12.3-megapixel sensor found in the more expensive D90.

does work while recording. The problem of the rolling shutter and other idiosyncrasies still exist.

In order to appeal to consumers moving up from point-and-shoot cameras the D5000 offers a much more intuitive menu system with graphics to indicate aperture size. What's more, the focusing includes face recognition. There are plenty of automatic settings for a variety of subjects and several retouching features, such as perspective control, soft filter and image overlay that can be applied after capture.

Having recently tried out several geotagging devices with varied success, I was finally able to try out Nikon's optional GP-1 unit which plugs into a new port on the D5000 and can be attached on the hot shoe or the shoulder strap. I found it was most convenient on the strap as it was less likely to be hit and also allowed operation of the pop-up flash.

The GP-1 unit automatically records every image's latitude, longitude and altitude

as well as time-of-day. The main problem is that, like all GPS units, it takes several seconds for it to triangulate its position from the orbiting satellites. Consequently, it does not always get a fix before you take a picture. It's not a problem if you're taking several shots in one location but can be a problem if you're grabbing shots quickly while on the move. For example, I often take shots through my windshield while driving. More than ever it's with photos like these where a GPS location is a godsend. I found that I was successful if I kept the camera primed by tickling the shutter button every now and again so the GPS would be ready for a quick shot. It worked most of the time although sometimes I got given a location many miles off-course, which was strange.

For the price, the D5000 offers excellent value. The picture quality is just about as good as that captured by a D3, at least up to ISO 800. Unless you really need the full-frame sensor, high speed, high ISO, heavy weight and ruggedness of the D3, the D5000



That's smoke—not clouds—obliterating the sun as it begins to set in Santa Barbara, CA, on the night of a major firestorm that nearly burnt the city in May. Photo captured from the beach in nearby Summerland by John Rettie with a Nikon D5000, AF-S Nikkor 18–200mm f/3.5–5.6 G ED DX lens set at 32mm, 1/1250 second at f/10, ISO 500.

could be considered an alternative. It's certainly good enough as a back-up camera. And if you want to capture HD video, have the availability of a pop-up flash or a swiveling LCD screen, the D5000 provides these features, while the D3 doesn't. That said, you could buy six D5000 camera bodies for the price of one D3!

For additional test images captured with the D5000 go to <http://www.johnrettie.com/NikonD5000samples>.



A \$275,405 Bentley Continental GTC Speed poses in the fog in the mountains above Santa Barbara, CA. Photo captured by John Rettie with a Nikon D5000, AF-S Nikkor 18–200mm f/3.5–5.6 G ED DX lens set at 38mm, 1/200 second at f/7.1, ISO 250.

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Further Information

Nikon D5000: www.nikonusa.com